A participatory model for ethnic audience development for the arts

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate strategies to increase ethnic minority group consumers' participation in arts performances in Australia. Our findings are based on focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with participants from ethnic minority groups, namely, Greek, Italian, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Indian in Australia. The findings indicate that mixed cultural/arts events and culturally specific events are the most favoured forms for attracting participation from culturally diverse audiences. Further strategies are to provide more arts and cultural education for minority and mainstream cultures, and appropriate marketing activities to minority groups could increase arts participation of ethnic consumers. Our research will contribute to further understanding of ethnic marketing literature and cross-cultural marketing for the arts sector.

Keywords: consumer behaviour, cross-cultural marketing, audience development, arts, ethnicity

Crises in the arts have occurred worldwide (albeit differently) in Europe, the United States (US), Australia, and Asian countries (O'Hagan, 1998). It is not unusual to hear of events such as the reduction in funding for National Endowment for the Arts in Washington DC, the closing of the Schiller Theatre in Berlin, cutbacks in funding for the arts in Britain, the sale of parts of the collection by major arts museums in New York (O'Hagan, 1998), and the struggle for survival of the St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra since the collapse of communism in Russia (Temirkanov, 2002). Similarly, Australian governments at both Federal and State levels have adopted a stance that “the arts industry must become more business-focussed in order to survive and thrive” (Soutar, Hough, Turner, Seares, Close, BIZTRAC et al., 1997:1), a stance that has accompanied declining government subsidies (e.g., Rentschler, 2002, Soutar et al., 1997). These funding challenges have created a unique environment for strategic changes in arts organisations, in which they must confront real financial difficulties.

Given constraints in funding for the arts and levels of competitiveness of many forms of leisure in a contemporary society, there is an increasing emphasis on audience development as well as research conducted in arts consumer behaviour in marketing literature. Also, the need to increase the diversification of audiences as well as the size of audiences is emphasised (Hill, O'Sullivan & O'Sullivan, 2003). Arts marketing aims to encourage more frequent attendance and target new segments and/or non-attendance, including ‘difficult to reach’ markets such as ethnic minorities. Given the importance, little research has been done in relation to audience development of ethnic arts consumers.
although this is an increasing potential market in many countries including Australia, the US and the UK as part of the globalisation process, migration and/or political crises.

Increased arts audiences are also required in Australia. The country is a multicultural nation experiencing a large number of migrants annually entering on different types of visas. Australia consists of a diverse mix of cultures in which about 44% of Australians were either born overseas or have one parent born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Considerable immigration has come from Asian countries since the last century such as China and Vietnam. This indicates that ethnic minority groups are significant segments of the Australian population. While promotion of cultural diversity is a priority for many Australian bodies including arts organisations, arts participation of ethnic minorities (especially those from Asian and African backgrounds) has remained low in comparison with the mainstream groups (from the UK, the US and Africa) (Australia Council, 1998). Participation in arts-related events is believed to contribute significantly to community development and create societal harmony in multicultural countries (Globalism Institute & VicHealth, 2006). Further, audience development also helps increase financial income and viability for arts organisations.

In this study, we explore the perceptions of ethnic minorities from Vietnamese, Chinese, Indian, Italian and Greek backgrounds in relation to the following research questions: *How can arts and cultural participation of ethnic minorities be increased?* This paper contributes to addressing the gap in current knowledge in arts marketing literature on strategies to increase attendance of ethnic minorities in arts and cultural events. The paper begins with a review of the literature on factors influencing the decision-making process of arts and ethnic arts consumers to participate and how to increase their attendance. We then report on the research methods, sample used and the empirical findings from the focus groups. We conclude the paper with discussion and contributions to theory and practice.
LITERATURE REVIEW: UNDERSTANDING ETHNIC CONSUMERS

For the purposes of this research, by participation, we refer to 'receptive cultural participation' such as attending arts and cultural events, music concerts, museums as audiences/visitors, and we adopt the definition of van Wel, Linssen, Kort, & Jansen (1996). 'Active cultural participation' (such as drawing, acting as professional or amateur artists, (van Wel et al., 1996) is not part of the scope of this study.

Ethnic groups can be described as any group defined or set apart by religion, national origin, or race (Ogden, 2004). There is general agreement in the marketing literature that cultural variation influences consumer behaviour. Generally, many companies are finding that they need to orient to previously ignored cultural groups for continued success in the marketplace as these ethnic minority groups grow in size and proportion in the dominant culture (Ogden, 2004). Thus, the authors emphasise that it is important to be aware of the difference between value expressive and utilitarian products when looking at ethnic consumer behaviour, as it may vary between product types. As part of the service industry, the arts possibly reveal more challenges to attract ethnic consumers than other services or industries due to their intangible nature.

Prior marketing literature suggests many strategies could be applied to increase arts participation. For example, Goulding (2000) argues that in order to attract wider audiences (not only ethnic audiences) it is important to understand customer expectation, experience and satisfaction in relation to their visits to a museum or a cultural event. Further, for the museum section, the quality of museum visitors' experience is mediated by a number of interrelated factors such as socio-cultural (i.e., cultural identification, continuity of theme and story, social interaction), cognitive (i.e., the creation of mindful activity, involvement and engagement), psychological orientators (i.e., scene setters, routeing and mapping), and physical and environmental conditions (i.e., crowding, seats and noise).

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1 By arts events we mean the following: carnivals, street arts and circuses (not animals), culturally-specific festivals, museum or gallery exhibitions, musicals, pantomimes, plays/dramas, operas/operettas, music concerts or other live music events, live dance events.
The question of which art form attracts more attendance of ethnic minority groups is often less discussed in the literature. Instead, the literature discusses how to attract more attendees to music concerts and museums, or why people attend/do not attend high art events. We generally agree that it is challenging to attract large audiences to attend some art forms such as opera, ballet and classical concerts, regardless of marketing efforts. However, events which focus on an ethnic subgroup and provide more ethnically relevant art forms could encourage ethnic arts participation. These events help to meet their need to stay in touch with traditional culture, as well as contributing to the formation and maintenance of a cultural identity, while still permitting integration with mainstream society (Syson & Wood, 2006, Netto, 2008). Syson and Wood (2006) argue that understanding and being oriented towards the needs of different ethnic groups in society is important, not just for business success, but for the benefit of society as a whole. Thus, Syson and Wood suggest that “events have a key role to play in creating a single, shared identity within a diverse population as they can bring people together in a way which allows them to learn with and from each other” (p. 251). Their research has interesting implications for arts organisations by using the arts as an important conduit for community development and societal cohesiveness.

Albeit that it is challenging to develop audiences from any cultural background for high art forms, Huntington’s description of arts marketing practices in Germany shows that it is possible to attract a broad and diverse audience to the performing arts. She proposes replacing the traditional marketing variables (product, price, promotion, place) with “reinforce consumer experiences”, “real audience growth”, “role fulfilment”, and “recurrence”. In addition, arts marketing, policy, and planning needs to take place at a macro level (such as governmental and industry-wide) in order to maximise the opportunity to bring performing arts to a wider audience (Huntington, 2007). However, no specific strategies are provided to increase arts participation.

The provision of opportunity for arts participants to socialise and to extend their experience is important (Kolb, 1997, Kolb, 2001b, Kolb, 2001a), especially for segments such as younger generations and ethnic audiences for high art forms. For example, Kolb (2001b) suggests that the provision of a concert experience, including socialising with peers in an unconventional way, is even more important
than the opportunity to listen to live concerts. Further, changes to less formal settings rather than traditional concert halls (such as classical music performed in community halls, churches, and shopping malls) could facilitate arts attendance (Kolb, 2001b). Kolb (2001a) recommends that to attract non-attenders, marketing departments may need to provide niche programming ensuring an enjoyable experience rather than relying on loyalty. Specifically, marketing may need to target individually packaged events to specific ethnic market segments (Kolb, 2002: 180). These packaged events must provide multiple benefits to meet the attender’s social needs (meeting people, socialising and enjoying social aspects of the concert) while also providing artistic content.

The role of education (Kolb, 2001a, Colbert, 2003, Tajtakova & Arias-Aranda, 2008) and family influence (van Wel, Couwenbergh-Soeterboek, Couwenbergh, Bogt & Raaijmakers, 2006, van Wel et al., 1996, Kolb, 2001a, Colbert, 2003) as the major determinant of future involvement of an individual in the arts is also emphasised, especially high art appreciation (such as classical music, opera and ballet). Therefore, Colbert (2003) suggests that increased association and exposure with the arts during childhood, or through their family/parents or school partnership with arts organisations, provides children with memorable artistic experiences which may help to turn them into future arts attenders. Also, in order to raise awareness and develop students’ knowledge, teachers could provide training to connect children to values compatible with the arts which can facilitate their association with the arts in adulthood (Colbert, 2003) (Kolb, 2001b, see also Tajtakova & Arias-Aranda, 2008 for recommendations on educational activities/programs provided by theatre to school students in a context of Slovak Republic). For the above reasons, orchestras should invest heavily in family concerts and community outreach (Kolb, 2001a).

Prior research also provides pricing strategies to increase arts participation and to ease cost related concerns in relation to arts participation, suggesting that reduced ticket prices could be offered to increase attendance (Kolb, 1997, Garber Jr., Muscarella, Bloom & Spiker, 2000). In addition to pricing strategies, the quality of the performance and entertainment (with well-known stars), and/or other added attributes to the social aspects of the evening such as a free drink with the ticket, a discount on meals at nearby restaurants, availability of food before or after the performance, could encourage classical
performing arts attendance (especially young audiences) (Kolb, 1997, Garber Jr. et al., 2000, Kolb, 2002). Other amenities such as pre-concert talk, refreshments, easy parking, and a comfortable social setting could also add significant value to the product (Garber Jr. et al., 2000).

In summary, while there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to audience development, the identification of local strengths and a strong commitment to building relationships with potential audiences are fundamental factors in finding the right approach to successful audience development (Barlow & Shibli, 2007). Next, we report on our research methods, the sample and the data analysis process.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

Exploratory research was conducted with ethnic minorities in Australia using focus groups and in-depth interviews (semi-structured) to inductively explore the perceptions of participants on the topic. The findings of this exploratory stage also help to develop constructs for a scale to be used in the second stage (quantitative measurement) of this study.

Focus group respondents were selected by purposive sampling procedures (Neuman, 2006) while interview participants were selected by both purposive and snowball sampling procedures. We acknowledge the limitation of snowball sampling as some participants might know each other. However, we triangulate our data by focus group data to increase the validity of the qualitative data. The findings from interviews and focus groups were consistent. All ethnic informants were chosen to meet the following criteria: (1) Australian residents who have lived in Australia for at least two years (to ensure that each participant had a certain familiarity with Australian culture and, possibly, some involvement in mainstream cultural life) to provide a mix of participants who have lived in Australia long-term and short-term; (2) Non-English speaking background (their first language was not English). This criterion helped us to investigate the extent to which levels of English proficiency and cultural origin affected involvement in the arts and cultural events; (3) the ability to understand and communicate in English as evidence of their level of acculturation in Australia. We selected from five significant ethnic groups: Chinese (Mandarin speakers), Vietnamese, Indian, Italians and Greeks. We selected these five ethnic groups because they were populous minority groups in Australia. In total we
conducted 19 interviews with 5 cohorts of ethnic origin audiences and five focus groups. The focus group participants were different from the interview participants. Each group consisted of 6 to 8 people from the same cultural background. A total number of 49 participants were recruited.

Qualitative content analysis was used to identify themes and patterns. Our data analysis comprised three linked sub-processes: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After editing, segmenting and summarising the interview data, we developed a coding system to code, identify and develop concepts and categories based upon research questions and the literature. We then identified certain themes and propositions. These processes helped yield patterns and regularities, which then became the categories or themes, compatible with the purposes of the study. In the data reduction stage, themes and categories were confirmed, discarded and refined in relation to what we saw in the data. Knowing that this was an ongoing process, we refined the data repeatedly to confirm and verify themes, and drew conclusions from the data in relation to the research questions on how to increase attendance by ethnic audiences in arts events.

**FINDINGS**

In order to answer the research question, “How can participation of culturally diverse audiences in arts events/arts performances be enhanced?”, in a scope of this paper, we selectively report three major themes, namely, (1) Preferred arts form and/or cultural events; (2) Arts and cultural education; and (3) Importance of information availability and advertising.

**Preferred Mixed Arts and/or Cultural Events**

When each cultural group was asked about which art form could enhance their cultural group’s participation in arts performances, they did not mention their specific cultural event as the most important factor in enhancing their participation. Instead, all focus groups recognised that a combination of different cultural/multicultural activities in a casual setting (i.e., outdoor festival) is the best form for enhancing their participation. This is an important finding for Australian arts organisations as classical orchestras, for example, could perform in major multicultural events. However, more cultural sensitivity might be required to promote the participation of culturally diverse audiences. All participants
recognised the importance of community arts events, such as festivals with a variety of performances, activities and food stalls of different cultures, to enhance participation rather than classical concerts, opera or ballet. The following quotes represent this common view (more quotations are provided in Appendix 1):

Even having two communities together participating in events, like attracting more Indians, like having a Diwali Festival and inviting with a Thai Festival or something like that, a combination of two festivals and two different communities come together. (Indian FG participant)

Further, the idea of actively inviting ethnic minorities to mainstream events or vice versa was mentioned as a factor to enhance cultural inclusiveness between different minorities and mainstream groups in Australia, as one Indian participant said:

Invite the Indian community to participate in Australian culture. I am just giving you an example. When someone comes here migrating to Australia, help them talk to the Australians at least a couple of months before to make sure that they understand what it is they will face. (Indian FG participant)

Along with this theme, non-European participants tended to emphasise that having more culturally-specific events was also important. Indian participants strongly recommended having Bollywood in cultural events to expose their culture to others and also as a means to attract more Indians to cultural/art events: "That [Bollywood] is the key thing for Indians" (Indian FG participant). This view was also mentioned by several Vietnamese and Chinese focus group participants in which Spring and Mid-Autumn festivals were mentioned.

While a combination of sport in an arts event is not a dominant theme among all focus groups, this interesting perspective from Italian and Greek participants reflected an Australian culture in which sport is the most favourite form of leisure. This seems to be a good way to increase the interaction of sport spectators with the arts. These representative quotes demonstrate the view:

... I think a lot of Italians integrate into the Australian community through football. A lot of Italians love football. ... Not Australian Rules Football. They love soccer. Out of probably all the nationalities in Australia the Italian background are the ones that watch the football more - Italians and Greeks. (Italian, male, FG participant)

In the course of data analysis, we also saw conflicting themes among focus groups. For example, Chinese focus group participants believed that in order to attract and sustain audiences, arts events should have a cultural-focus rather than a religious-focus, "My recommendation is that festivals and things are not religious based but just cultural based" (Chinese FG), whereas Italian participants
suggested that many religion-based art events (which reflect certain cultures) could attract thousands of people and should be offered more (see Appendix 1 for the direct quote). Thus, arts organisations might be able to blend different cultures with respective religions as outdoor performances/events to attract diverse cultural audiences.

Cultural Education

The provision of more education and awareness about different cultures (and possibly their art) in order to increase ethnic participation is another common theme mentioned in some focus groups. This was indicated by the Vietnamese and Italian focus group participants:

... Yes. But also to give like an understanding of what it is about. For example, if you've got an artist and he's French, you need to explain it to the Vietnamese people like who this man is and why he is famous and what he did to engage people's interest, “Oh my god, this man is fantastic”! Like for example... (Vietnamese FG participant)

The quote below provides reasons why the provision of education or cultural awareness is needed to increase participation. A Vietnamese participant connoted that their parents from Vietnam significantly lacked education about different cultures and Western arts, which hindered them from attending different cultures/arts events:

It is obvious that there is a specific age group that you're leaning towards because for us, we're educated here, so we were taught about famous artists like Van Gogh, Leonardo da Vinci, but for our parents, that education... they finished school at Grade 3, so they never heard of these artists. (p31) (Vietnamese FG participant)

The above quote indicates that age and generations could be influential factors in regard to arts participation. The older generation of or newly arrival migrants tend to participate much less than the first generation of migrants. Therefore, the provision of education about mainstream arts and cultures might be an important antecedent to encouraging ethnic audiences to participate in arts events/shows. The education can be as simple as providing explanations beside paintings or artefacts in an exhibition and/or museum in the several major languages in Australia, or having programs on SBS radio to introduce basic Western art and/or the art forms of ethnic minority groups. More complex education programs could be provided by the Council to interested participants. Generally speaking, apart from music education programs in schools for students, music and/or dance performances would be ideal to
introduce new art forms. These have been introduced in festivals such as “Mind, Soul and Body” which attracted large audiences from minority and mainstream backgrounds.

Importance of Information Availability and/or Advertising

In the course of our focus groups, we also found that availability of information about shows, festivals or arts events and word-of-mouth was important to increase ethnic participation. Many participants mentioned that information on arts events did not often seem to reach culturally diverse audiences, especially the older generations: “No. Information is insufficient;” “Not enough”; “Vietnamese newspapers would not advertise the Jewish Festival or the Spanish Festival. They wouldn’t advertise a play that is going to show or a musical for a professional exhibition. They don’t advertise any of that.” (Vietnamese female FG participants)

Having councils distribute information seemed to be an effective way to reach these markets rather than the formal channels of marketing such as newspapers or online. Other participants suggested that using radio may be a good medium to reach ethnic markets. This view was mentioned in Chinese and Vietnamese focus groups: “I think radio is better. Radio – SBS Radio may be better.” (Vietnamese FG participant)

In the next section, we discuss these findings in light of arts marketing literature on how to increase arts participation.

DISCUSSION

We set out to answer the question, “How can participation of culturally diverse audiences in arts events/arts performances be increased?” We found common views amongst Chinese, Vietnamese, Indians, Italians and Greeks regarding strategies to increase ethnic arts participation: (1) preferred arts/cultural events; (2) cultural education; and (3) information availability and/or advertising. Notably, community arts events/performances were the much preferred way of enhancing culturally diverse participation rather than professional arts events/performances. In particular, our findings support those of Kolb (1997, 2001b, 2001a) that social interaction amongst people from different communities are a key to attracting culturally diverse audiences. This is an important finding as arts organisations might
consider bringing their art forms to festival settings to help attendees become familiar with their arts which, in turn, may encourage their future participation.

While Syson and Wood (2006) and Netto (2008) indicate that culturally specific events are preferred among ethnic groups as these events help to stay in touch with traditional culture, and maintenance of a cultural identity. However, our findings move beyond this view indicating that mixed cultural events/activities with arts components were found to provide excellent opportunities for cultural groups to socialise and learn from other cultures and, at the same time, develop attendees’ familiarity with different art forms. Our findings were also supported by McCarthy and Jinnette (2001) who state that an individual’s inclination to participate is influenced by factors such as their belongingness to certain social groups, their perception of the value of the arts, and their levels of effort to attend some art forms. Having cultural exchanges between different communities could establish an essential platform for developing community harmony and societal cohesion in Australia.

The role of education or educational attainment and the exposure of individuals to the arts during childhood or through their family or school, as the major determinant of future involvement of an individual in the arts (Kolb, 2001a, Colbert, 2003, Tajtakova & Arias-Aranda, 2008), was not strongly supported in our study. However, our findings suggest that more cultural education and awareness among diverse cultural groups and mainstream groups should be encouraged. This finding needs to be further supported by quantitative data.

Barlow (2007) indicated that a strong commitment to building relationships with potential audiences is a fundamental factor in attracting their participation, and our findings reinforced this discussion. Our findings further indicate that information availability and/or advertising about the arts events in partnership with local councils is important. Arts organisations and their marketing efforts about upcoming arts events need to improve to attract ethnic audiences by using a variety of ethnic media such as SBS radio, ethnic newspapers and flyers, and more direct marketing strategies could be considered. The use of word-of-mouth marketing strategies and especially ethnic newspapers distributed through local councils (in ethnic communities such as Dandenong and Richmond) and multicultural organisations, such as Multicultural Arts Victoria and the Victorian Multicultural Commission, would
be useful to advertise specific events to target ethnic groups. From this study, we propose that arts organisations in Australia will be able to increase culturally diverse audiences by greater cultural inclusion in arts events cultural education and information dissemination/marketing. In so doing, we foresee that the arts can be used to foster greater social inclusion in culturally and socio-economically diverse nations such as Australia.

CONCLUSION AND CONTRIBUTION

This paper presents the findings of the first stage of the study of audience development. We aim to set preliminary culturally-sensitive typologies for holistic arts sector development in Australia. Arts events are believed to be a vital means of connecting culturally-diverse communities (Globalism Institute & VicHealth, 2006). Therefore, our research has created the foundation for understanding the perception processes of ethnic audiences in order to enhance their attendance and participation in arts events. Arts managers can apply these findings when considering different ways to attract ethnic audiences, and by identifying their perception of arts participation.

This research contributes not only practical strategies for arts marketers to develop their ethnic audiences, but also provides evidence-based research for policy-makers to create a socially-inclusive arts industry. As social demarcation between the rich and the poor continues to grow in many developed multicultural countries, our research would not only be critical for future arts marketing and cultural research, but also to contribute to socially-inclusive communities where every resident can act as a contributor to build socio-economically strong cities and nations.

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### Preferred mixed arts or cultural events

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<td>I remember as a kid in primary school or high school and you would have those multicultural days, and everyone would come and dress in their traditional dress. For Italians it was just their normal clothes. And you would bring some Italian food and you would wear like your Italian flag or whatever. It would be good to go to something like that, not so full on in your costume and everything, but to just have a flag, this is where I come from – it is a multicultural thing where everyone is there and you are labeled. I am proud of this background et cetera and it would be a good way to meet people and talk to people. (Italian FG participant)</td>
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<td>I just think the national arts festival is quite OK, because it’s international, because it’s got different, Spanish, Greek, Chinese, anything, it’s like one of those arts festival that you can actually explore yourself and see different things. (Chinese FG participant)</td>
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<td>Oh, wouldn’t they have like you know, for example, suburb, different suburbs have festivals, you know have street festivals like in Thomastown they have like a Barry Road Festival on the street and they have rides and the kids and community – everybody, all cultures. That is what local councils... (Vietnamese FG participant)</td>
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### Culture-specific performance

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<td>Yes, to include something of our culture in it. Of course, it is going to bring... most likely it could bring more Vietnamese people to attend because we are not going to attend something that... Do you know what I mean? Include something of our culture in certain events. (Vietnamese female FG participant)</td>
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### Sport in events

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<td>It is funny you should say that but I was going to say if some Italians come from overseas I would take them straight to the MCG for that. I think that’s... if you can talk football you can integrate anywhere. If you are male I guess (p.28). (Italian, male, FG participant)</td>
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<td>Ah... I think the best event, generally speaking, and perhaps personally speaking, I think it is sports. Because everyone can take part in that sport. You do not need skills, you do as you go. It is not like arts, you have to have specific skill, but sport you learn as you go. And you can participate in a team... everyone from different cultural backgrounds follow certain rule and understand and interact. It is not just for the participant, but the people who are coming to watch the event, that is very, very important. Lots of people! Families come and learn to integrate in the team... bigger community. (Greek interview participants)</td>
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### Religious based arts events

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<td>The event that I mentioned before about they do over at Manningham Council about the 'Stations of the Cross' and that. Everyone attends that. I see all different nationalities, Christians, people who do like that sort of thing they do attend a lot... M1: I think that religion is either the main source of bringing people together or separate or create a war, in my opinion. (p.32) (Italian FG participant); So, religion can do both, bring people together or completely separate them. (p.32)</td>
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### Arts or cultural education

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<td>... Yeah. I think that’s sort of... not only migrants, I think Australians should see that (migrant museum) too. That creates like... you understand more about the migrants coming into this country and the influence they have had into the Australian community. I don’t know, I don’t think Australia would have been what it is if it wasn’t for the migrants. All migrants. I am not going on about Italians, all migrants. And that’s why we are very lucky in Australia because of the multiculturalism that we have (p.27). (Italian FG participant)</td>
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### Information availability and/or advertising

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<td>The council I’m in they do a good job because they send out brochures and stuff every time the community based, so I think they’re doing a good job, that’s how I found out about them (p.31). (Chinese FG participant)</td>
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<td>Whitehorse Spring Festival do a lot of advertising in the local paper and the full event list, it’s very good (p.32). (Chinese FG participant)</td>
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<td>It is a big problem, because information is knowledge, and knowledge is power, SBS has a really good radio station and that encompasses all of the cultures, I listen to it, but I’m at an age where I don’t want to listen to 101FM or whatever... (p.34). (Chinese FG participant)</td>
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